

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5484

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 0762

E O 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IS, PGOV, MILI

SUBJECT: GOI ESTABLISHED MINISTERIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE

REF: TEL AVIV 0728

1. SUMMARY: ISRAELI CABINET FEB 2 DECIDED IN PRINCIPLE TO ESTABLISH 10 OR 11 MEMBER MINISTERIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR MILITARY OPS, INTEL, AND IDF ORGANIZATION, INCLUDING DEFENSE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. NEW COMMITTEE IS BASED ON RECOMMENDATION OF INTERIM AGRANAT REPORT. IN BACKGROUND IS SHARP CRITICISM RE "KITCHEN CABINET" STYLE OF MEIR GOVT, WHICH MANY ISRAELIS BELIEVE HAD SIGNIFICANT BEARING ON MISTAKES PRECEDING OCT 1973 WAR. WHILE SOME LABOR PARTY MINISTERS LIKELY TO BE EXCLUDED FROM COMMITTEE ARE UNENTHUSIASTIC, ITS ESTABLISHMENT SHOULD HELP RABIN TO FURTHER UNITE CABINET BY DRAWING JUNIOR COALITION PARTNERS INTO KEY DECISION- MAKING FORUM. END SUMMARY.

2. CABINET APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE FEB 2 ESTABLISHMENT OF MINISTERIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE AND WILL DECIDE ON ITS ACTUAL
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COMPOSITION AT ITS NEXT MEETING. IT IS TO BE CHAired BY PRIMIN

RABIN AND WILL BE COMPOSED OF NO MORE THAN HALF THE CABINET-- I.E., ITS TOTAL NUMBER WILL BE EITHER TEN OR ELEVEN, INCLUDING REPS FROM ALL COALITION PARTIES. PRESS SPECULATES THAT COMMITTEE, IN ADDITION TO RABIN, PROBABLY WILL INCLUDE PERES, ALLON, ZADOK, HILLEL, RABINOWITZ, BAR-LEV, GALILI, HAUSNER (ILP) SHEMTOV (MAPAM) AND EITHER BURG OR RAFAEL (NRP).

3. ESTABLISHMENT OF MINISTERIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE IS BASED ON ONE OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY ZADOK COMMITTEE AFTER PUBLICATION OF INTERIM AGRANAT REPORT IN APRIL 1974 TO IMPROVE COORDINATION OF DECISION MAKING, PARTICULARLY IN WARTIME, BETWEEN TOP CIVILIAN AND MILITARY LEADERSHIPS. CABINET, HOWEVER, DOES NOT RELINQUISH BY THIS DECISION ITS PEROGATIVE TO DISCUSS SECURITY MATTERS. MOREOVER, DECISIONS BE APPEALED FROM SMALLER TO LARGER FORUM.

4. COMMITTEE IS EMPOWERED TO ACT IN THREE AREAS: DECISIONS AFFECTING IDF, INCLUDING DEFENSE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, MILITARY OPERATIONS, AND INTEL ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENTS. IN CASE OF WAR, COMMITTEE WILL FUNCTION AS WAR CABINET OR WILL APPOINT EVEN SMALL GROUP OF MINISTERS TO FUNCTION AS SUCH.

5. AFTER OCTOBER 1973 THERE WAS PROFUND SENSE OF DISSATISFACTION WITH DECISION MAKING PROCESS IN SECURITY AND INTEL FIELDS. IN RETROSPECT, ISRAELIS RECOGNIZED THAT HIGHLY PERSONALIZED WORK METHODS OF BEN GURION AND MRS MEIR WERE NO LONGER ADEQUATE. IN FIFTIES AND EARLY SIXTIES BEN GURION HAD TAKEN VIRTUALLY ALL KEY DECISIONS IN SECURITY FIELD WITHOUT CABINET CONSULTATION. IN 1969-1973 PERIOD, MRS MEIR HAD CONVENED AD-HOC, INFORMAL AND IRREGULAR "KITCHEN CABINET" MEETINGS, FROM WHICH ALL BUT SELECT FEW WERE EXCLUDED. DEFICIENCIES OF THIS UNSTRUCTURED APPROACH CAME TO A HEAD IN WEEK PRECEDING OCT 1973 WAR, WHEN CABINET AS A WHOLE DID NOT DISCUSS MILITARY THREAT UNTIL LAST MOMENT, AND ONLY "KITCHEN CABINET" WAS ENGAGED IN ASSESSMENTS.

6. ESTABLISHMENT OF MINISTERIAL SECURITY COMMITTEE IS INTENDED AS MEASURE TO ASSURE PUBLIC THAT RECOMMENDATIONS OF AGRANAT

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REPORT ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED, AND THAT FOUNDATION IS BEING LAID FOR MORE COHERENT AND EFFICIENT APPROACH TO SECURITY DECISIONS. SOME LABOR PARTY MINISTERS, HOWEVER, WERE LESS THAN ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT NEW COMMITTEE. PERES VOTED FOR IT BUT ALSO NOTED THAT FULL CABINET UNDER RABIN HAS FUNCTIONED EFFECTIVELY IN SECURITY FIELD, AND THAT CREATION OF SUB-COMMITTEE WAS UNNECESSARY. FOUR OF THOSE LIKELY TO BE EXCLUDED FROM IT ABSTAINED IN YESTERDAY'S VOTE, OBJECTING TO STEP WHICH THEY BELIEVED WOULD

DOWNGRADE THEM TO SECOND-CLASS-MEMBERS OF CABINET.

7. RABININ FACT HAD DELAYED REACHING DECISION RE FORMATION OF NEW COMMITTEE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS IN PART DUE TO THESE OBJECTIONS. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, DECISION SHOULD HELP RABIN TO KEEP HIS COALITION UNITED, BY DRAWING REPS OF SMALLER PARTIES INTO KEY FORUM. ILP MINISTER KIL HAD COMPLAINED BITTERLY AT TIME OF OCTOBER WAR THAT HE AND OTHERS STATUTORILY HAD FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOI DECISIONS BUT HAD BEEN LEFT COMPLETELY IN DARK. AT LEAST IN FORMAL SENSE THIS HAS NOW BEEN RECTIFIED.

8. COMMENT: RABIN ALREADY HAS ESTABLISHED MORE OPEN STYLE OF CONDUCTING CABINET BUSINESS, DISPENSING WITH "KITCHEN CABINET" METHODS OF MEIR GOVT. WE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS AN INNER CIRCLE, TO WHICH PERES AND ALLON BELONG BY VIRTUUE OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES, AND ZADOK AS A RESULT OF THE COMPATIBILITY OF HIS VIEWS WITH THOSE OF RABIN. BUT THESE FOUR MINISTERS DO NOT CONSTITUTE A "KITCHEN CABINET" IN THE SENSE OF AN EXCLUSIVE CLIQUE. WHAT THE NEW COMMITTEE WILL MEAN IN PRACTICE AS REGARDS GOI DECISION-MAKING IS NOT YET CLEAR.
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